



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2012**

Philosophy

PHIL4

(Specification 2170)

Unit 4: Philosophical Problems

Report on the Examination

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PHIL4, Philosophical Problems

General Comments

As a general point students would be well advised to ensure that they have read the selected text. Notes are an invaluable supplement to textual study but they should not be regarded as a substitute for primary reading. The overall standard was similar to last year with no question posing any unexpected difficulties. The Hume text was the least popular.

Question 01

Those students attempting Question 01 had a sound grasp of the arguments, but tended to blur or conflate Hume's reasons. A closer reading of the text would have avoided this. However, most students scored well on this question.

Question 02

On Question 02, good students demonstrated a detailed grasp of the text. Hume's definitions often featured, together with the issue of their compatibility. Standard problems with Hume's account were evident and good illustrative examples often featured.

Question 03

Hume's account of knowledge was generally well done with his position properly grasped. More might have been made of the shades of blue issue. Some students provided detailed commentaries but left themselves short of time for the evaluative discussion.

Question 04

The Plato text was popular and this question was done well with students incorporating much relevant detail. Most students were able to identify one purpose, though sometimes it was implicit in the exposition.

Question 05

Student responses to this question tended to be slightly disappointing, with too many responses focusing on the qualities of the philosopher ruler. The theory of Forms was well explained, but the 'Knowledge is Virtue' thesis tended to be neglected.

Question 06

Students handled this question competently with strong textual detail featuring in support, especially regarding the similes. They would benefit from a deeper grasp of **why** Plato thought there had to be Forms.

Question 07

The Mill text was reasonably popular and this question was competently done. The tyranny of the majority point was well made. The main problem was the neglect of Mill's historical background to show why democracy seemed ideal.

Question 08

This question elicited some good discussions, though philosophical issues were sometimes neglected in favour of general discussions of modern examples. Such examples are

acceptable, but a balance needs to be struck between their exposition and the evaluative discussion which they serve to illustrate.

Question 09

Students displayed a sound grasp of Mill's arguments with appropriate examples. There could have been more detail in the evaluation of Mill. It should be noted that asking rhetorical questions is not the same as evaluating, and neither is counter-asserting.

Question 10

The Descartes text was popular and many students answered this well. Textual detail was accurately presented, though some students struggled to identify **two** distinct purposes.

Question 11

Here students showed considerable awareness of Descartes' actual arguments and some strong critical discussions were generally well-directed. The indivisibility argument sometimes neglected Descartes' faculty's response and cases of split-personality were treated as non-controversial. Similar comments apply to Freudian alleged counter examples.

Question 12

The majority of students showed a sound grasp of the arguments, but they could have used greater detail in setting out the ontological argument. The trademark argument was well understood, but there could have been more depth in the critical discussion. Alleged counters like sponge cakes, discarded cigarettes and forest fires were not questioned and some opportunities were therefore lost. Too much importance was given to the issue of the Cartesian Circle and its impact on the arguments.

Question 13

The Nietzsche text was quite popular with the majority of students answering it well. The main problem was some neglect of the third stage, together with appropriate illustration.

Question 14

It was promising that those familiar with the text were able to select appropriate examples for discussion. There was a tendency to generalise and counter-assert from weaker students.

Question 15

Again, responses showed that the text had been engaged and Nietzsche's position was often set out in a detailed manner with the use of appropriate examples. There were some sophisticated discussions, though weaker students contented themselves with juxtaposing contrary positions. Many raised the issue of Nietzsche treating religion as a means to an end, but few questioned whether this really amounted to support for religion or whether it **could**.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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